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ABSTRACT

Outcomes of a teacher empowerment project implemented at a middle school are described in this paper, with a focus on the perspectives of a school administrator, a middle schools specialist, and a university faculty evaluator. The purpose of the project was to improve student achievement through establishing a school improvement team. From the assistant principal's point of view, the process was perceived as "crisis intervention." The middle-school specialist focused on teachers' orientations and the resolution of tensions that emerged during the needs assessment process. Tension negotiation was critical in developing and implementing an action plan that established a sense of ownership. The university evaluator attended to the floundering of the school faculty and their need for structure and information, perceiving that a discrepancy existed between the project description and the program in process. A survey of faculty and students differentiated between general sentiment and individual grievances; understanding this difference eventually permitted the team leaders to lead. (13 references) (LMI)

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Rita G. O'Sullivan, David B. Strahan, & Dorothy Harper

Objectives

Improving schools through increasing site-based management of educational programs is a fundamental tenet found within the school restructuring literature. Similarly acknowledged is the need for newly empowered teachers to receive leadership training while assuming greater decision-making responsibility. Unfortunately, although many embrace the ideals of and formulas for restructuring schools, the territory of actual implementation is only vaguely chartered. Few talk about how to guide teachers toward leadership; particularly when the teachers may be reluctant to change. The purpose of this study is to describe a teacher empowerment project implemented in one middle school from the perspective of three individuals who were expected to help lead the teachers into leadership: an administrator, a middle schools specialist, and an evaluator.

Theoretical Framework

The school restructuring movement is so widespread that the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) focused two issues of Educational Leadership (April 1990 and May 1991) on restructuring schools. ASCD also sponsors a Consortium on Restructuring Schools so that interested members may share ideas and experiences related to school restructuring. Another organization that focuses on restructuring, the Coalition of Essential Schools, has grown from a few member schools in 1984 to 150 individual schools; in addition, six state department of education and the Education Commission of the States also claim membership. There is widespread agreement that schools must change to improve the quality of education and that inclusion of teachers in the decision-making process is essential to that change. The blueprint for achieving such change is less clearly defined and strategies for overcoming teachers' reluctance to change are scarce.

Glickman (1991) in a discussion of school reform stated, "The principal of a successful school is not the instructional leader but the coordinator of teachers as instructional leaders" (p. 7). Aronstein, Marlow, and Desilets (1990), describing impediments to site-based management, say that the principal must shift from decision maker to facilitator. Other articles describe how to garner central administration and building school principal support for teacher empowerment (David, 1991; Murphy, 1991; Westerberg & Brickley, 1991).

Commonly the literature reports success stories of how school-people band together to restructure (Aronstein, Marlow, & Desilets, 1990; Brickley & Westerberg, 1990; MacPhail-Wilcox, Forbes, & Parramore, 1990; Raebeck, 1990). Some identify constraints to restructuing (Sizer, 1991) and other may report on how teachers are often reluctant to change (Foster, 1991; Glickman, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Washley, 1991).

In analyzing the dynamics of school change, Tye (1987) emphasizes the complexity of changing the "deep structure" of schooling. Deep structure refers to those common characteristics of school culture that are shaped by deep-seated values toward education and shared assumptions about teaching and learning. One of the most pervasive aspects of the deep structure of most schools, for example, is what Tye calls a "control orientation" which shapes many of our practices regarding discipline, space utilization, and planning. Because it is so basic, changing this "control orientation" is very difficult. Tye insists that most changes occur at the more visible level of the "unique personality" of the school where characteristics are more visible and variable.

Little has been reported in the literature about how to proceed when those who are offered the opportunity to lead refuse it. Similarly, there are very few accounts of how substantive barriers to restructuring were overcome. This study reports the reasons for and implementation of a successful strategy to employ when those who can (acknowledged teacher-leaders) won't (are reluctant to commit to the restructuring mandate).

Methods and Data Source

A central office teacher/curriculum coordinator and a middle school assistant principal successfully wrote a grant proposal to a state department of education to fund a six-month teacher empowerment project. The purpose of the project was to improve student achievement at the school through the establishment of a school improvement team. Members of the school improvement team would be the acknowledged teacher/leaders in the school and would meet to plan activities aimed at strengthening the instructional program and generally improving the school's climate. The grant was to provide modest teacher stipends for additional time devoted to the school improvement team, in-service middle grades/leadership development training, and project evaluation. As originally designed the project would begin in January and end in June 1991. Due to state budget crises, the project was not funded until April 1991.

The two consultants, a middle grades specialist and a program evaluator both from a nearby university, who previously had worked with the school's faculty, met with the two co-project directors (the teacher/curriculum coordinator and assistant principal) and the school's principal to discuss implementation of the project. The school improvement team had been formed; 16 teachers had been selected and had begun meeting the previous month. Consultants were advised that the school improvement team was reluctant to take action and appeared unsure of how to begin.

Consultants then met twice after school with the School Improvement Team members but without administrators. During subsequent meeting, that included administrators, the school improvement team decided to conduct a school-wide needs assessment of faculty and students, distribute a newsletter to the entire faculty and staff, divide the school improvement team members into six teams (focusing on people, place, program, process, policy, and practice), draft action plans for school improvement based on the needs assessment, and organize to implement those plans.

The needs assessment results were shared and the draft action plan revised with the entire faculty at the end of the school year in June. Early in July a new principal was appointed to the middle school. Twelve to 15 teachers met voluntarily on Wednesdays during the summer to further refine the action plan. The consultants met with these teachers and the new principal twice to promote support for the plan

from the new school administrator. At the end of July the two consultants and the newly appointed school principal met with the school district's superintendent to secure his support prior to implementing the school's action plan for improvement. By December, two-thirds of the action plan had been implemented and the rest was well on its way to being accomplished.

Analysis of Events

The previous section paints a positive picture of teacher empowerment. On the surface, from the factual report above, working with the school improvement team to bring about change was fairly quick , straightforward, and successful. Consultants and administrators followed suggestions from the literature to facilitate teachers toward site-based management. For example: a critical mass of teachers was convened to study what needed to be changed; ways of implementing change were considered through consultation with a broad range of the school's constituents; and then people worked hard, overcoming constraints, to implement change. In reality, however, the situation was exceedingly fragile and the accomplishments of the school improvement team, while undeniably laudable, were results of a series of "crisis resolutions" in which consultants served as "therapeutic counselors".

The heart of the story, the important analysis of events, lies in the perspectives of the people leading the teacher-leaders. Often their stories and perceptions are ignored as too subjective for generalization. Yet the key to the project's success did not lie in the factual, sequential telling of its accomplishment but rather in the sharing of the counseling process that led to the events. The following section presents the observations of the program from the administrator's, the middle school specialist's, and the evaluator's perspectives.

Administrator

During the summer preceding the 1990-91 school year, as part of our school system's restructuring efforts, a new middle school was formed. Teachers from the old middle school (housing grades 6 and 7) were moved to the old junior high building. Staff from the junior high's eighth grade joined the new middle school faculty. All the students and two of the administrators (including myself) were new to the building. The school was scheduled to house approximately 100 more students than allowed for by design. All of the school's instructional materials and furniture had to be rearranged or shipped to new locations. Many teachers expressed feelings of disorientation and anger before the school year had even begun. For these and other reasons (unknown at the time) there was an unwillingness or inability to work together.

The situation did not improve during the early part of the 1990-91 school year. Administrative and curriculum staff felt that we were a school in crisis. In an attempt to solve some of our problems at the school, I wrote a grant, together with the curriculum coordinator, entitled "The Leadership/Crisis Management Team: Empowerment for Teachers; Goal Achievement for the School." The problem statement given in the grant expressed my opinion of our dilemma:

> Following restructuring in the system, a significant proportion of the teaching staff at [the school] is exhibiting the following characteristics: lack of competence in curriculum areas; lack of competence in managing student behavior; negative attitudes; lack of involvement in school improvement efforts; and stress.

Goals established during the 1989-90 school year by a transitional school improvement team composed of members of the old middle and junior high faculties were not being accomplished. These goals focused on student achievement, student discipline, student/teacher attitudes and the transition into a new middle school instructional team.

Evidence of the crisis was found in the classrooms and the halls. Discipline problems were severe and frequent, attendance by teachers and students was poor, attitudes toward students was negative, failure rates of students at the end of the first grading period were high, and teachers' responses to an attitude survey as well as general inquiries were often negative. Administrative attempts to engage teachers in efforts to generate positive solutions to these problems were unproductive. Immediate action was needed, but we did not have a sense of direction at the building level. The curriculum coordinator and I felt an outside consulting team might help us analyze and alleviate the crisis. We solicited the help of two university faculty members who were experts in the areas of middle grades education and evaluation. These individuals had worked with some of the middle school faculty previously and were aware of our history.

When we wrote the grant, the curriculum coordinator and I felt the major responsibilities of these consultants would be to assist us in training School Improvement Team (SIT) members to: observe and evaluate staff, develop school policies and procedures, and model teaching and student management techniques. The process which the consultants used in implementing the program, however, was completely unexpected. Instead of taking charge, the consultants focused on a process that involved counseling sessions, the development of trust, a willingness to reveal feelings, and a great deal of discomfort on the part of the three administrators and the curriculum coordinator. Ultimately, however, many of the school improvement goals, previously mentioned, were reached through this method.

The discomfort began immediately following the initial meeting of the two consultants with the administrative/curriculum staff. At this meeting, the consultants asked to talk privately with the SIT members (i.e. without administrators) to "feel out" the situation. A second meeting was held, again without administrators, a week later. It was difficult being left out. During those meetings, a variety of issues were developed as being central to the crisis situation at the school. Teacher and student surveys were written and distributed by the SIT. Questions focused on "how things got done" at the school, as well as on the people, the building, the programs, and specific positives and negatives about working at the school. These surveys were collected, sealed, and delivered to the consultants for compilation at the university. Results were shared in a meeting of administrative and teaching SIT members.

Whereas the administrative/curriculum staff had focused on weaknesses on the part of the teaching staff as the root of our current crisis, teacher and student responses to the surveys indicated that the administration was also at fault. Lack of communication, consistency, and a "hard line" on discipline by the administration were recurrent themes in the responses. Some of the comments were very specific. The curriculum coordinator removed herself from the program at this point since survey responses indicated that she had too much control over decision-making at the school.

It was difficult for the three administrators to take all the negative responses as constructive criticism, but it was essential that we do just that. This was the first time during the school year that teachers had felt able to voice the sources of their frustrations honestly. We had to listen. As a result of this more open communication,

some trust began to be developed between the teaching and administrative staff and a process for taking action was developed.

SIT members wrote action plans in the areas of: people, place, policy, program, process, and practice. We presented these plans to the entire faculty at the end of the school year, for approval, during a mandatory staff development activity. The faculty was asked to split into groups and take part in expanding the action plans, to assign specific individuals as being responsible for carrying out portions of the plan, and to develop time lines.

Prior to the leadership development program, the level of teacher involvement in such "brainstorming" activities had been minimal. However, on this day in June, all teachers and administrators seemed to be engaged and excited about possibilities. My group even elected to skip a scheduled break so that we would not waste any of our new opportunity to make improvements. When the groups came back together in the staff development meeting, we were able to finalize a detailed draft for our 1991-92 School Improvement Action Plan.

Before disbanding, the faculty decided that Wednesdays should be alloted as school improvement days during the summer. Those teachers who wished to do so were encouraged, by their peers, to volunteer time each Wednesday morning to begin the restructuring which would ensure the success of the action plan during the new school year. Approximately 12 teachers did meet throughout the summer.

Some of the issues discussed during the Wednesday meetings involved communication strategies. Others involved student management policies. A great deal of time was spent in deciding whether students should be allowed to chew gum or wear hats in the building. Although this may seem superficial, the decision to allow for "responsible chewing" and hat wearing as individual teachers determined appropriate for their particular classrooms indicated an openness and willingness to compromise which had been lacking previously. This type of dialoguing has been an essential part of the program. Without it, school improvement efforts would have been severely limited.

As I look back, many of the crises that arose at the new middle school during the restructuring stemmed from a lack of communication. The two, previously separate, faculties had difficulty communicating with each other regarding their different orientations toward students. The teachers did not feel comfortable discussing problems with the admministration. Those of us in administrative positions were hearing cries for help, but did not have the information necessary to provide assistance. We were also defensive, not wanting to admit we might be part of the problem. The objectivity of outsiders was an essential element in our establishing trusted communication links (e.g. the sealed, anonymous survey responses) which enabled us to begin working together toward school improvement. As long as we weren't communicating, we weren't feeling powerful enough to efect change. Once people could talk together, the outlook for the next academic year was good.

I am currently a principal at a different school. I have not been back to the middle school to see for myself how successful the leadership program was or how many parts of the action plan have been implemented. I do know that the perception among middle school staff members with whom I have talked is that 1991-92 has been a much better school year for all concerned. The anger is no longer apparent in their conversation.

Middle School Specialist

"Life is trying to emerge from chaos."
(teacher response #1.13)

When I was invited to participate in this effort, I was surprised to hear the project described as "crisis intervention." I knew that the movement of the sixth and seventh grades to the new building to join the eighth grade in forming a middle school had been planned for some time. Teachers from the sixth and seventh grade building had been attending our summer Middle Grades Institute for a number of years. I had worked with several of them in a series of dropout prevention projects and had spent many hours in the school as part of those efforts. During the summer preceding the transition to a middle school at least a third of the faculty and all of the administrators had attended our summer institute and had generated plans for initiating interdisciplinary teaming and a classroom-based guidance program. In the late fall, I was thus very surprised to hear that the school was "in crisis." The teachers that I knew seemed to be committed to middle grades philosophy with lots of ideas for creating a successful school. The administrators that I had met seemed to have a strong grasp of the middle school concept and had described sound plans for creating a supportive school environment. Not having visited the school during the first few months of the year, I was curious to know how the situation had evolved to a point where an application for a "crisis intervention" grant might be appropriate.

About the time that the grant application was first discussed, I had an opportunity to spend a day at the school and meet with all of the grade level teams. These meetings were scheduled as a follow-up to our dropout prevention grant from the previous year. I wanted to see how each of the teams was working with the "disconnected" students who had been identified the year before. In each of the team meetings, I was struck by the degree to which the teachers seemed to feel that the school year was off to a "bad start" and by the ways that they seemed so frustrated with their efforts to create positive team experiences. When I asked how things were going, I heard a great deal about the "lack of discipline" in the new school. I heard stories about students "skipping out and "hanging out" in the woods all day. Each team told me a similar story about a group of teachers who found students gathered at a "hideout" in the woods during the school day. I heard stories about students hiding in the stairwells, roaming freely through the halls, and creating loud disruptions. When I asked about efforts to work with the "disconnected students," conversations returned repeatedly to discipline. Several of the teams expressed concerns that their efforts toward interdisciplinary teaming had been hampered by "cross teaming" situations created by the central office. I also learned that the administration had decided to postpone implementation of the teacher-based guidance program because the transition had been so difficult.

When I met with administrators at the end of the day, I asked about the teachers' concerns. I was told that a few serious disciplinary incidents had occurred but that the stories were more prevalent than the actual cases. Administrators also reported that scheduling problems had hampered teaming and that they had "backed off" on classroom-based guidance at the request of teachers who were feeling the stress of the transition. I left the school feeling that the transition to a middle school must have been more difficult than had been anticipated while hoping that the climate would improve as the grade levels "settled in."

When we returned in the spring to begin the leadership development project, I found that the perceptions of the faculty had not improved. In fact, as I spoke with teachers informally, I sensed that some of the frustrations regarding discipline had turned to anger. Teachers were especially harsh in criticizing other teachers and administrators who were preceived as "soft on discipline." One teacher expressed a concern that "our reputation in the community is really bad," and I sensed that other teachers shared this frustration as well.

Our first meeting with the administration team heightened my sense of curiosity about what was really happening in the school. The administrators described their efforts to initiate a "leadership team" to address the problems that had surfaced during the transition and to plan strategies for improving the situation for the beginning of the next year. The administrators suggested that while a few teachers were having difficulties with discipline, most of the teachers were doing very well. They expressed confidence in the ability of the teachers they had selected for the leadership team to help them make improvements.

Our first meeting with the leadership team was a memorable event. When we explained our understanding of the project as an opportunity to clarify issues and facilitate the development of an action plan, we were greeted with a number of skeptical questions. We were asked whether or not suggestions from the leadership team would matter, whether or not the school administration would implement the team's recommendations, etc. I think we found ourselves trying to gain the trust of the team, promising to listen, promising to serve as the outsiders to share their concerns with the administration in a straightforward manner, promising to keep our conversations confidential.

As team members began discussing their concerns, I was again struck by the apparent severity of teachers' concerns about discipline. Teachers reported that students were being sent to the office for all sorts of reasons, including chewing gum and wearing hats. The phrase "out-of-control" was used repeatedly in describing the ways that students "had taken over the school" and that "the administrators' hands were tied because they could not suspend as many students as in the past." The teachers who were most vocal seemed to be most concerned about student behavior in the "shared spaces" of the school: the hallways, the stairwells, the cafeteria. Some seemed outraged that the students continued to wear hats and chew gum in violation of school rules. Others seemed less stressed about these infractions and more concerned about basic respect.

The concerns about discipline still seemed confusing to me. By this time, I had visited the school five times, had walked through the hallways on numerous occasions, had visited classes, and had talked with teachers informally around the school. I had yet to witness any of the infractions that were reported so vividly.

The first breakthrough in our sessions with the leadership team came with the development of the survey. The chairman of the leadership team had drafted a survey to gather systematic information about teachers' perceptions. This idea met with enthusiastic response. Team members expressed repeated beliefs that "everyone needed to be heard" and that "results would need to he anonymous." When I suggested using the "5 P's of Invitational Education" (People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes) - plus a sixth P (Practices) as a systematic framework for this process of needs assessment, team members seemed pleased to have a concrete strategy for analyzing the entire school climate.

When we returned to collect the survey responses, I was struck by the anxiety expressed by team members. Before the meeting began, several individuals asked us how we would guarantee that none of the administrators would read the handwritten surveys or identify the teachers who responded. We spent most of this session describing how we would create safeguards. I noted after this meeting that the underlying tensions among participants seemed to center on issues of control. Teachers seemed to be raising a number of deep-seated questions:

who controls access to information?
who controlled decisions?
how much control is necessary?
how do we balance control of student behavior and support for them as people?

Survey responses provided vivid evidence of these tensions. In response to the statement "our middle school is a place where....," many teachers expressed concerns about control. The response that may have addressed the tensions at the school most succinctly was: "life is trying to emerge from chaos." Similar tensions were present in the responses to the item "students at our school..." with many responses suggesting that students "need to be exposed to firm rules and high academic standards" and others indicating that students "are for the majority caring people who want to learn."

Action planning began in earnest with the analysis of the responses. Assigning teams of participants to analyze responses to generate a needs assessment of each of the 6 P's provided a "hands on" strategy for involving everyone on the team and making sure each response would be considered in drafting the action plan. Our system of encouraging each team to clarify concerns by analyzing responses, set goals based on those concerns, anticipate obstacles, list alternatives, and specify action plans provided a workable means to generate a comprehensive plan.

When the plan was drafted and reported to the entire faculty, members of the leadership team who served as "leaders" for their particular "strand" (people, places, policies, programs, processes, practices) were anxious to involve every teacher in the process of reviewing and revising the plan. as I observed the various teams working, I noted that all of the teachers seemed very serious about the review process. Several groups seemed reluctant to take a break and had to be reminded about the time frame for reporting back to the entire faculty. As groups reported back, I had the feeling that the faculty was beginning to "own" the plan.

Ownership became more apparent as teachers met informally during the summer for the Wednesday morning discussions. Now the agenda seemed to shift from :" Will this work?" to "How can we be sure that the superintendent and the new principal will accept it?" In our first meeting with the new principal, teachers seemed proud of the plan and eager to know whether or not the principal agreed with each recommendation.

I think this sense of ownership of the plan and belief in its value were the most important outcomes of the leadership team project. Looking back on the interactions that occurred over the four months of the project, I think that teachers felt that the transition to the "new school" created a sense of "chaos." Somehow, the feeling that "things are out of control" became so widespread that the deep structure of the school was threatened. The "control orientation" that Tye (1987) describes as such a basic element of school was disrupted to such a degree that teachers felt almost dysfunctional. Whether or not students were really out of control was not the issue. Enough of the teachers believed that the school was out of control and that they needed a mechanism for re-establishing a sense of order. I think the action plan

became such a mechanism. At its most basic level, the plan represented a contract for establishing control. In drafting the contract and involving the rest of the faculty in revising it, the leadership team created a sense of ownership and re-established the underlying control orientation that was perceived to be missing. The perception that "life is trying to emerge from chaos" may have captured the essence of the plan.

Evaluator

From my perspective, the success of the project was totally dependent on our ability at the outset to structure the leadership training in a way that was responsive to the needs of the School Improvement Team. Fortunately, the first planning meeting with the administrators warned us that the situation might be more complicated than just providing staff development training. Happily, the administrators allowed us to meet initially with the school improvement team without them, so that we could investigate our suspicions. Later, after an acceptable plan had emerged, the administrators were brought back into the process, and as consultants we were able to assume more traditional roles.

The project, not to anyone's surprise, was three months behind schedule before it was funded. When the Assistant Principal asked if she could include me in the project proposal, I agreed readily since I had been working with her and in the school district for the past three years. She sent me a copy of the proposal after it was submitted. I scanned the six pages and filed the proposal on the corner of my desk with the other pending proposals. When she came in March to say the project had been funded and the funds needed to spent by June, we agreed that we had better get together and talk about what they wanted done.

The other consultant on the project was a colleague of mine at the university. We had worked together on a number of projects in that school district and elsewhere. I believe we were both very comfortable with the prospect of continuing our relationship with the school district but a bit concerned about the expectations of what might be accomplished given the imposed time-frame.

At the first meeting with the school's principal and the two co-principal investigators (the school's assistant principal and the curriculum coordinator), we were told that the School Improvement Team had already been selected and had been meeting regularly. The principal explained how the beginning of school had been difficult and how they had not anticipated some of the problems resulting from the reorganization: none of the 6th, 7th and 8th grade students had ever been in the building before, half of the teachers were new to the building, the number of students in the building greatly exceeded the previous year, and the administrators were new. It had made control of the students difficult and teachers were trying to recapture control using punitive approaches.

The curriculum coordinator explained how the teachers in the school and on the school improvement team were in serious need of leadership development training. She offered as evidence the fact that she had had to come and help the School Improvement Team organize an end-of-year awards event because they did not know how to do it themselves. The previous year, I had worked with teams of teachers from each of the schools in the district in conjunction with an initiative to make schools more positive places for students. I had spent that year in amazed admiration for the energy, inventiveness, and ability of teachers to organize, right up to the end of the school year, new events that recognized students in positive ways. I asked the curriculum coordinator about the membership of the School Improvement Team and found

among the list the names of teachers I had worked with the year before. At that point I suspected that there was more going on than just the need for some in-service training in staff development and the need to evaluate the project.

We left the first meeting with an agreement that my colleague and I would meet with the School Improvement Team without the administrators. A week later we returned to the school to meet with the team. We began with introductions and by asking how the school improvement team thought we might be of assistance. We explained our role and asked them to tell us a bit about what had been going on at school that year. We asked for problems they had encountered and initially they gave us solutions to problems. They said that, among other things, they needed a new traffic pattern through the school, different teaming arrangements, more restrictions on students' movements and behaviors, a better, clearer discipline policy. I pointed out to them that these were not problems but solutions to problems and asked them to help us understand what brought about the need for these solutions. For the next 45 minutes they vented their frustration about the school year and explained to us that they did not feel supported. They were ready and able to work for change but did not feel that if they tried to accomplish something that the administration would allow them to do it. They cited examples from the school year where they had worked together, made decisions, began to implement plans only to have those plans counter-manded by the principal who was enforcing central office policy. They wanted to know what guarantees they had that they would be supported in their efforts. I acknowledged their concern but pointed out to them that they were, by virtue of their invitation to join the School Improvement Team, among the strongest teachers in the school. We had no guarantees, but it was my experience that if an improvement plan was based on identified needs and the action plan well thought out and responsive to the identified needs, then the administration would support the action plan's implementation. We ended that meeting with another meeting scheduled for the following week and much to think about. Administrators were not invited to the second scheduled meeting and we got their agreement to this stipulation at a de-briefing that occurred with them after the first meeting with the School Improvement Team.

My colleague and I discussed the event and strategized for the next meeting. We came back to the second meeting with suggestions of possible steps we could take together. The School Improvement Team came to the meeting with a written agenda and a sample faculty survey. We proposed that first we could conduct a needs assessment with all the teachers and students of the school. We explained that it would help us clarify where the most important problems were. Then the School Improvement Team members would help us summarize the information by dividing into six areas of school improvement: Place, People, Policy, Program, Process, and Practice. From the needs assessment, the six groups would draft an action plan for presentation to the entire faculty on June 4. By the end of the second meeting we were asked by the School Improvement Team to meet with the administrators, share our progress, and invite them back into the meetings.

My sense during this very delicate period was that our success at promoting leadership development with this group balanced precariously on our ability to listen and respond decisively. The School Improvement Team needed us to take them very seriously and act according to their wishes. I was extremely careful to deliver everything when it was promised. If I had not, they would have seen it as just another example of how their efforts went unheeded.

A week later we met to collect the surveys and to finalize our plans. Faculty, whom I had not met and who were not on the School Improvement Team, approached me before the meeting, gave their approval to the survey process, but anxiously asked me to make sure that their responses to the survey were secure. Security for the faculty surveys was discussed at length during the meeting. We devised a system whereby the survey data would be summarized removing all identifying information and then returned to the teachers for content analysis.

Timely return of the summarized survey data without any security breaches was for me the break-even point. After a month of meetings with the School Improvement Team, we had established our credibility and had them on the road toward defining the future for their school. Certainly there were a number of stumbles along the way to the successful implementation of the action plan, but our consultative role in those cases was facilitative and not precarious. The actual analysis of the survey information and the drafting of the action plans was a formidable task but one that just required our technical assistance. When the new principal was appointed mid-summer we were helpful in communicating the action plan that had been developed and its importance to the faculty. Once the new principal endorsed the plan, we contributed to the superintendent's approval of the plan. But these accomplishments pale in importance to establishing a working relationship with the School Improvement Team at the beginning of the project.

It would have been very possible at the beginning of the project to doom any chance of accomplishing our task. Had we come in there with a packaged leadership development program or pre-set ideas of what was needed, the School Improvement Team might have tolerated our presence, participated in the training, but no change would have occurred in the school. As it was, when we returned to the school the following December we found a totally transformed group. Much credit was due to the new principal, but the School Improvement Team was just that. They were empowered and considered themselves responsible for improving the school. By their own admission we had returned to a totally different school. Initially, at that meeting, they apologized for forgetting the action plan, because they had been busy with other activities. However, when we systematically reviewed their progress we found that most of the action plan already had been accomplished. It is a testament to their involvement that they had internalized the goals they set to a point where they could accomplish them without consulting the action plan. I am convinced that such accomplishment could not have occurred if we had not been sensitive to their needs in the very beginning of the project.

Conclusions

In telling our stories each of us has focused on a different dimension of the processes that occurred during this project. The administrator (the assistant principal) perceived the project as a "crisis intervention" for the middle school faculty. The school was in its first year as a middle school serving students in grades six, seven, and eight. The principal and assistant principal were new to the school and no student had previously attended school in that building. Many of the teachers had moved from another building and a number of unanticipated problems plagued the school year. The middle school specialist focused on the orientations of the teachers and the resolutions of tensions that emerged from the process of analyzing needs and discussing strategies for improvement. As issues surfaced in the development of the

action plan, it became clear that some teachers advocated an orientation toward control that differed sharply from the more student-centered orientation of their colleagues. Negotiation of this tension became a critical process in developing and implementing an action plan, especially as it established a sense of ownership. The evaluator attended to the floundering of the faculty and their need for structure and information. She perceived a discrepancy between the project as described on paper and the program in progress. It was initially difficult to differentiate between general faculty sentiment and individual teacher grievances. We conclude that a Rogerian search for the evaluation questions unearthed many issues, led to a school-wide survey of faculty and students, and permitted "those who could lead" to do so..

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